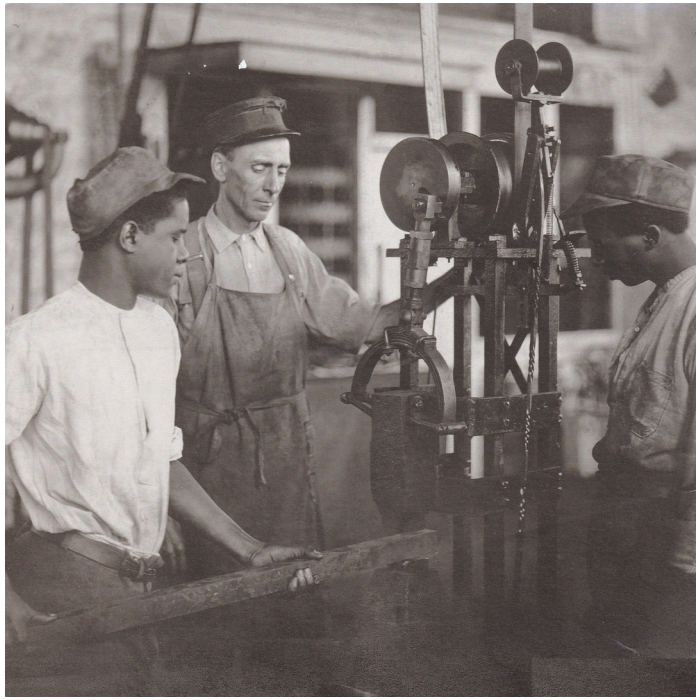
ORNAMENTAL IRON ARTIST

THOMAS F. GOOGERTY

FROM

PONTIAC, ILLINOIS



By

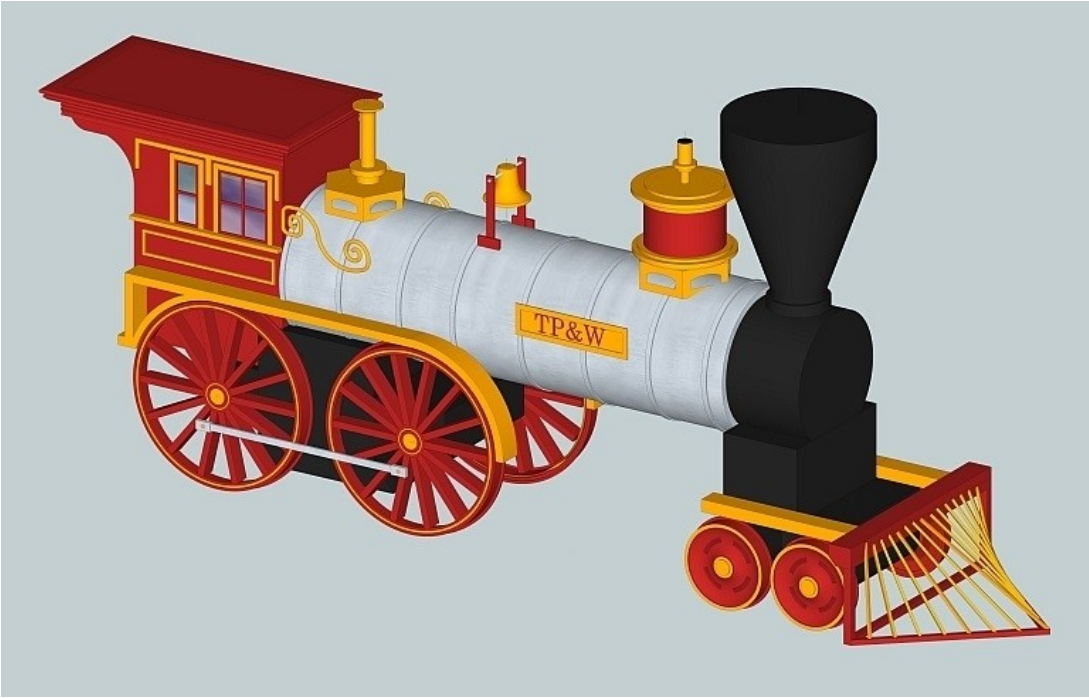
Dale C. Maley

Livingston County Historical Society

Last Updated: July 1, 2025

Thomas F. Googerty

- Grandfather born in Ireland
- Came to Pontiac from Elgin in 1850
- Was pioneer citizen of Pontiac
- Railroad came through Pontiac in 1854
- Set up one of the first businesses in Pontiac!
- Bought wood from farmers, band-sawed into right lengths to sell to the railroad



Thomas F. Googerty

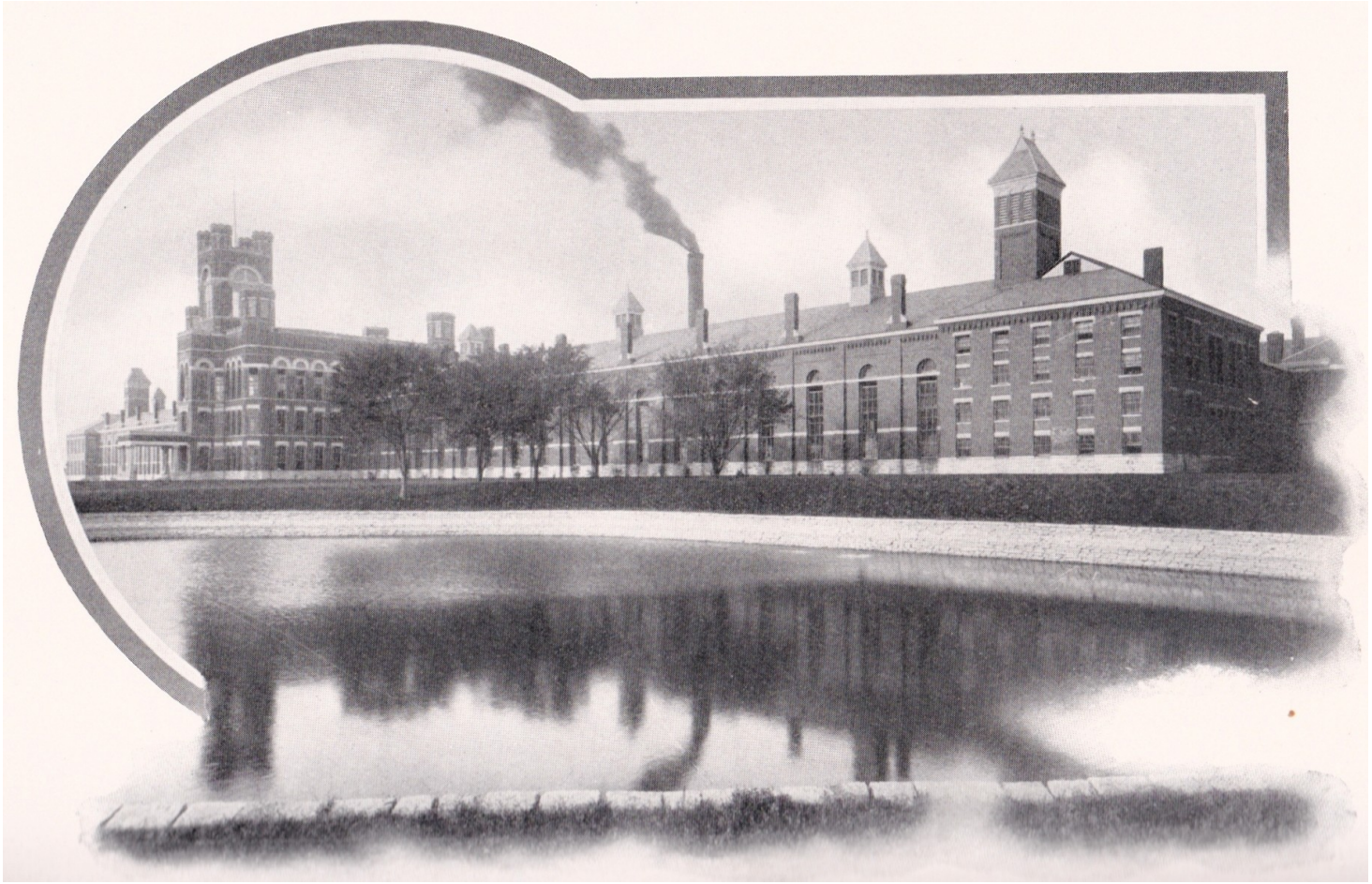
- Grandfather had wife and son join him in Pontiac
- Son joined the wood business, very successful until coal replaced wood in the 1860s
- Father of Thomas Googerty marries in Pontiac, starts having children
- Thomas F. Googerty born in Pontiac in ~1864
- Tragedy strikes in 1869, Tom's father killed in railroad accident
- Tom's mother widow at 35, four children < 7 years old

Thomas F. Googerty

- Thomas F. Googerty went to Catholic grade school in Pontiac
- He quit at 13 and apprenticed to local blacksmith
- Spent ~14 years traveling around country working at many different blacksmith type jobs
- In 1894, age of 30, accepts job as forging and blacksmith Instructor at Illinois State Boys Reformatory in Pontiac

Thomas F. Googerty

- Boys Reformatory built in Pontiac in 1871



Now the Pontiac Prison

Thomas F. Googerty

- The theory of the reformatory was to educate young criminals and teach them a trade.
- The reformatory trade education options included:

1. Granite tombstone manufacturing
2. Barbering
3. Textile manufacturing
4. Printing
5. Carpentry
6. **Blacksmithing**
7. Pipe fitting
8. Bricklaying
9. Laundry work
10. Engine work
11. Electrical work
12. Military drills
13. Farming.

Expanded to 25+ trades

Thomas F. Googerty

- In 1894, the reformatory averaged 2,132 inmates.
- The youngest boys were 10 years of age.
- Most of the boys were between the ages of 16 and 20.
- In 1894, 79% of the inmates were in the 16 to 20 age group.
- That year, 1,160 inmates were white, and 210 were non-white boys. (15% non-white)

Thomas F. Googerty

- The boys sent to the reformatory were convicted of many crimes.
- In 1894, the boys committed 53 different types of crimes.
- 76% of these crimes were theft-related.
- In 1894, twenty-six boys escaped from the reformatory.
- Twelve boys were captured, and three voluntarily returned to the facility.

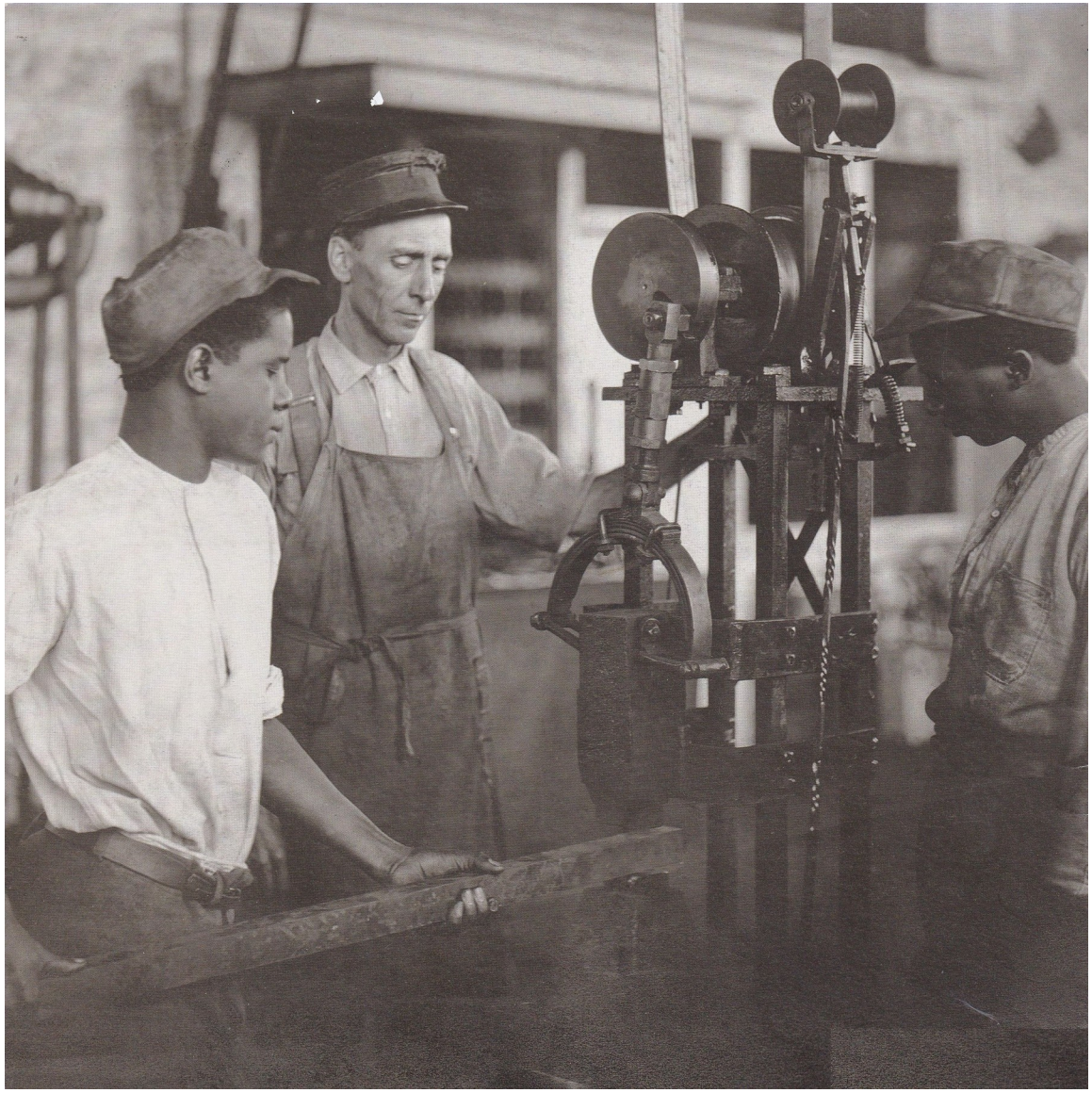
Thomas F. Googerty

- The 1894 inmate data indicated most boys came from broken homes, and their parents were of lower incomes and poorly educated.

- In 1894, 45% of the boys came from Cook County.

70% success rate over 5,000 boys!

Thomas F. Googerty

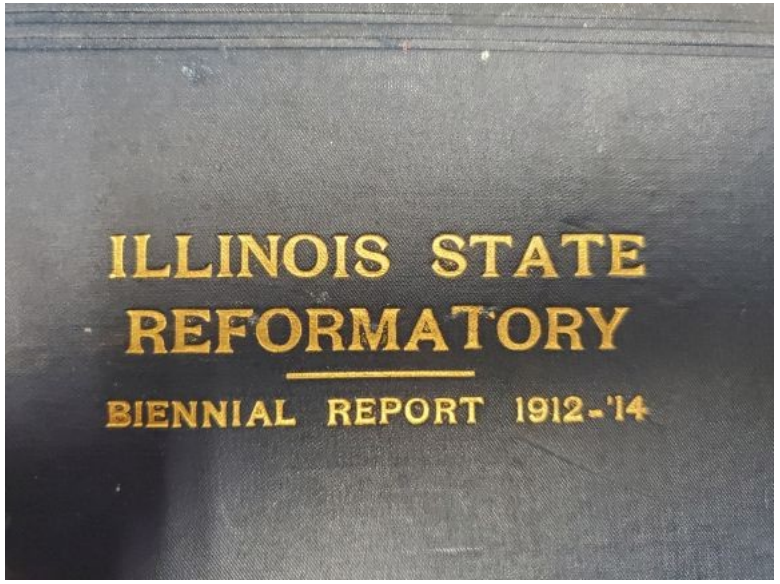


Instructor Thomas F. Googerty with 2 Students at the Reformatory

Thomas F. Googerty

- Report back to Governor of Illinois every 2 years
- Reformatory has their own printing plant to teach printing
- They created, printed, and bound the biennial reports !!
  - -Very high quality
  - -Excellent photos

- Historical Society has about 6 of these books from 1890 to 1916



Thomas F. Googerty

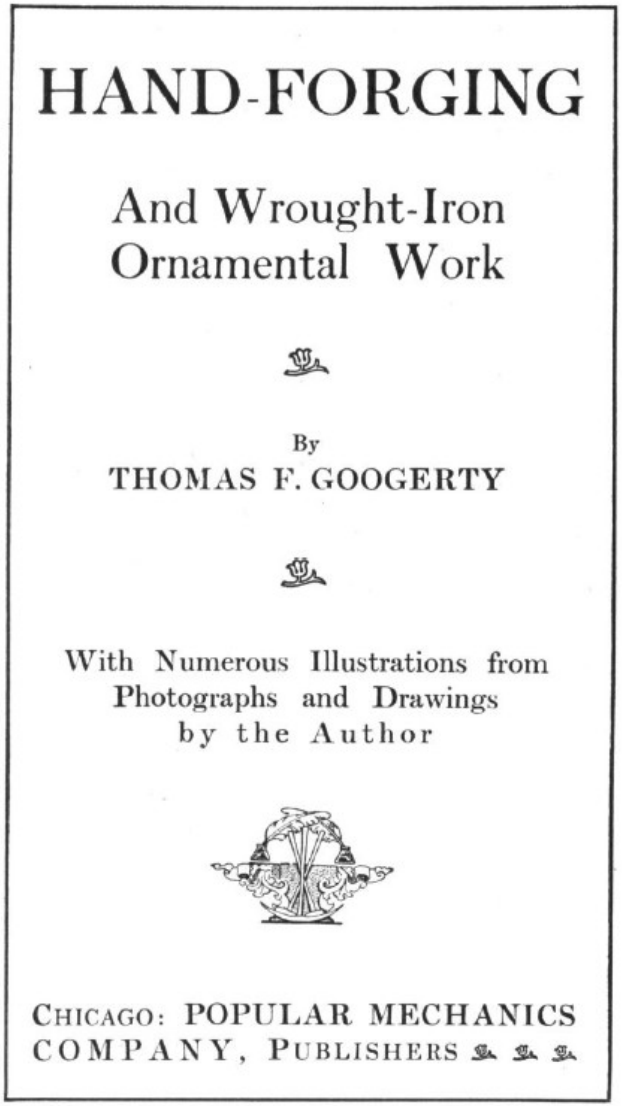
BLACKSMITH SHOP

Thomas F. Googerty

- Googerty began writing over 50 blacksmithing related articles for trade magazines and newspapers

- He wrote books in 1911, 1915, and 1937
  - -You can buy all 3 today as new books !!

- 1911 book is considered seminal work on Ornamental Blacksmith work



HAND-FORGING

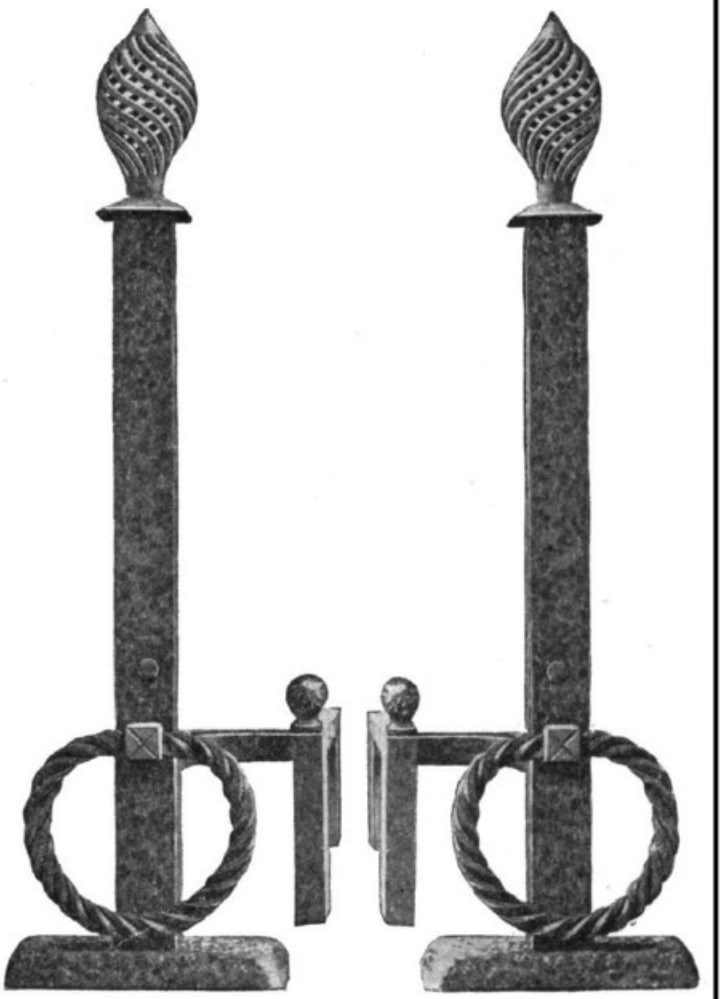
And Wrought-Iron Ornamental Work

By
THOMAS F. GOOGERTY

With Numerous Illustrations from Photographs and Drawings by the Author

CHICAGO: POPULAR MECHANICS COMPANY, PUBLISHERS

Thomas F. Googerty



Hand-Wrought Andirons

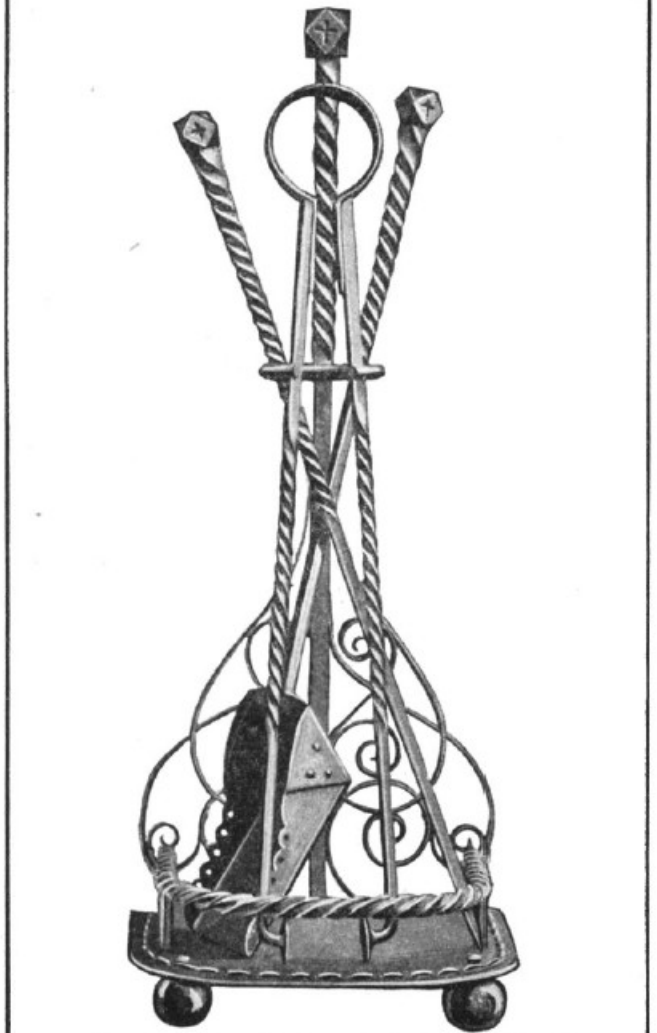


Fig. 47. Fire Set Made of Square Stock

Thomas F. Googerty

Fig. 82. Two-Light Candlestick

181

Fig. 108. Drawer-Pulls with Ring Handles

Fig. 116. Electric Lamp

Googerty Received National Acclaim in 1914

- In 1914, Thomas F. Googerty was elected to a **Craftsman** member of Boston's prestigious Society of Arts and Crafts.

- He was 50 years of age when he received this award.

- Thomas F. Googerty was elevated to the **Master Craftsman** level a few years later.

Thomas F. Googerty

- Thomas F. Googerty retired from full-time teaching in 1930.
- Thomas was 66 years of age when he semi-retired in 1930.
- He continued to work part-time repairing the thousands of locks he had made for the Reformatory
- Volunteered to continue teaching part-time at the facility
- By 1930, Googerty said he had “lost the feel of the hammer.”

Thomas F. Googerty

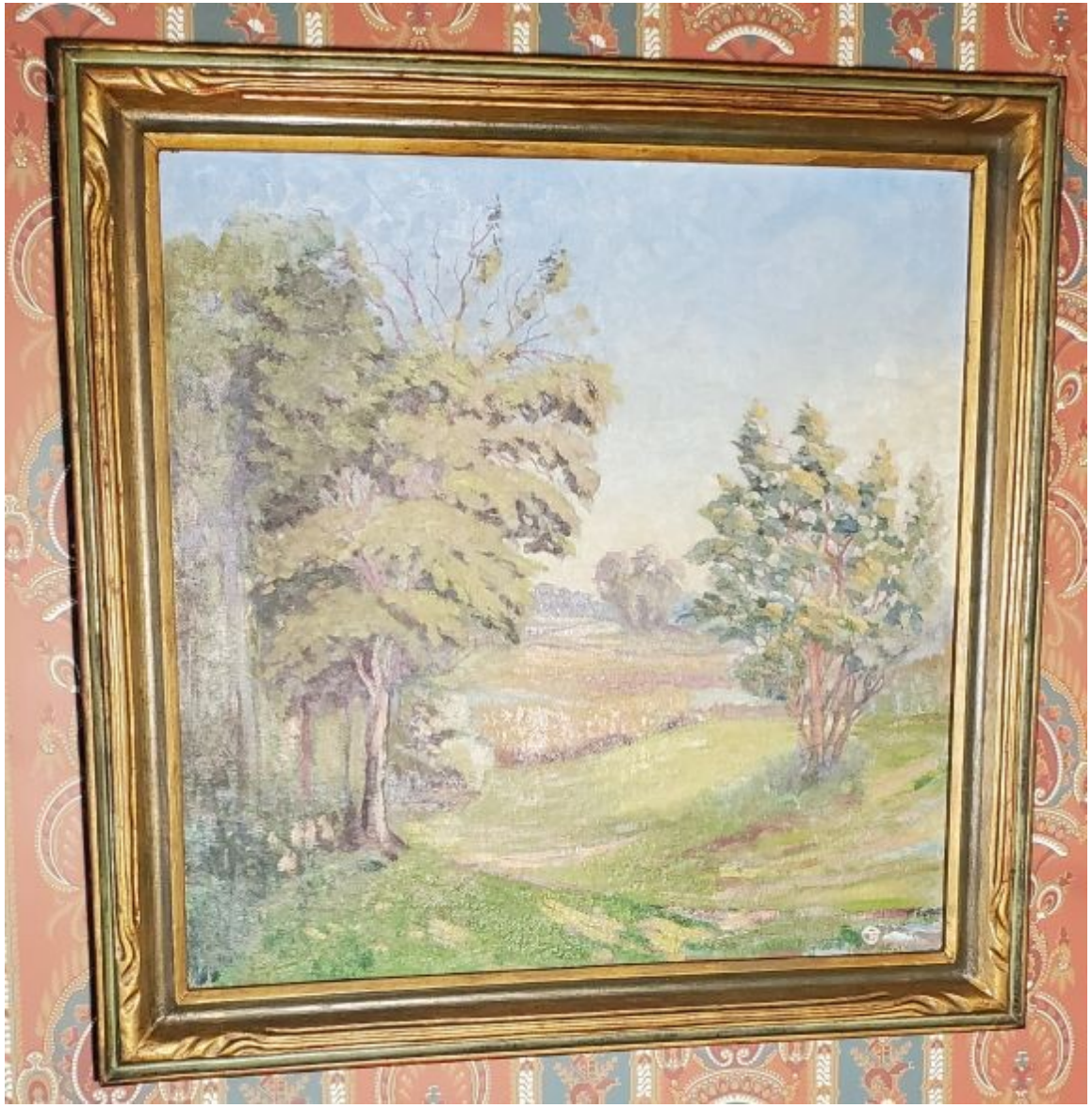
- Started to spend more time oil painting

- In 1940, Googerty and other like-minded local artists founded the Amitytown Society of Painters to encourage students and sponsor exhibitions.

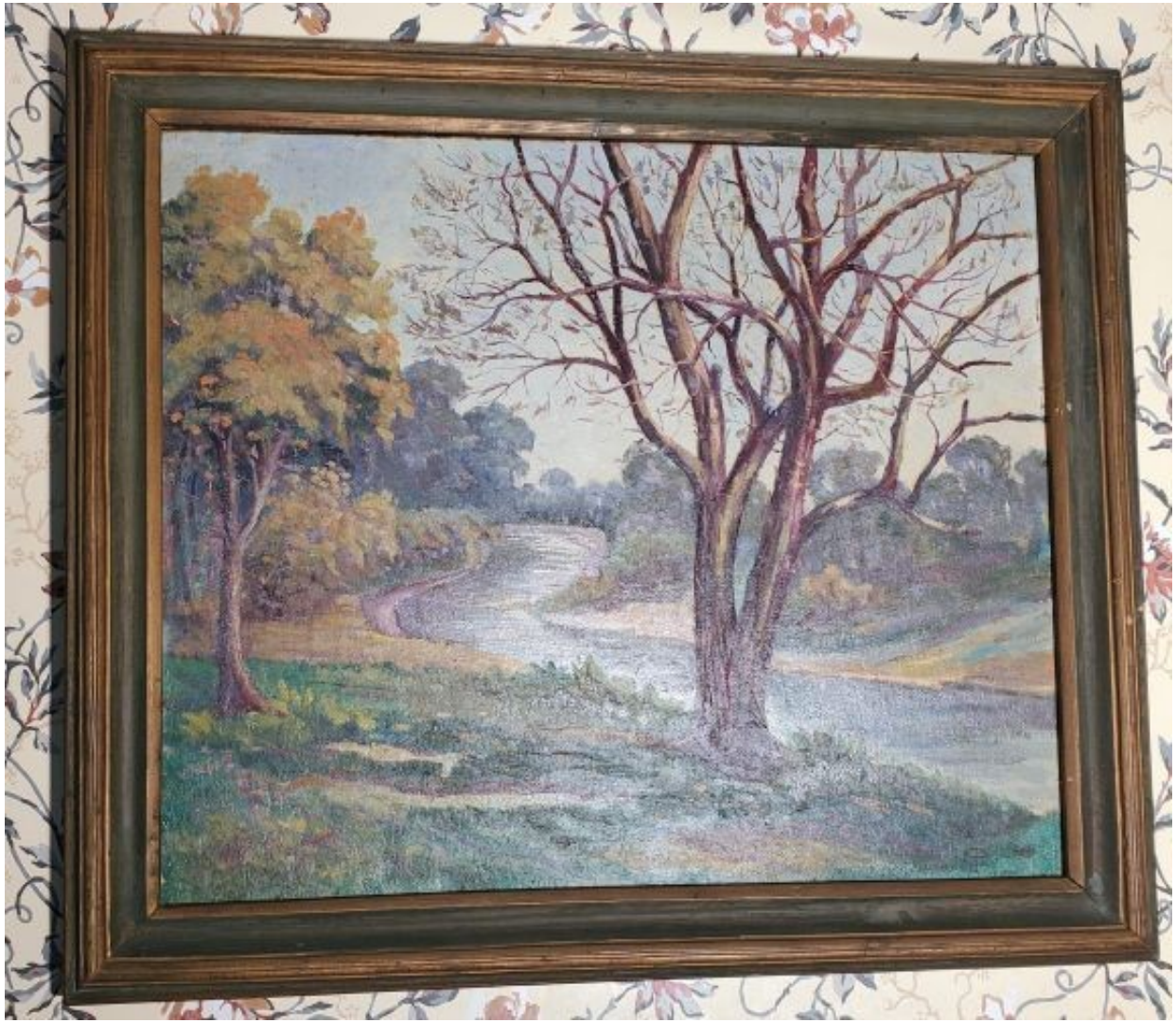
- Googerty exhibited his paintings at the annual exhibition of the Amitytown Society

Thomas F. Googerty

Thomas F. Googerty



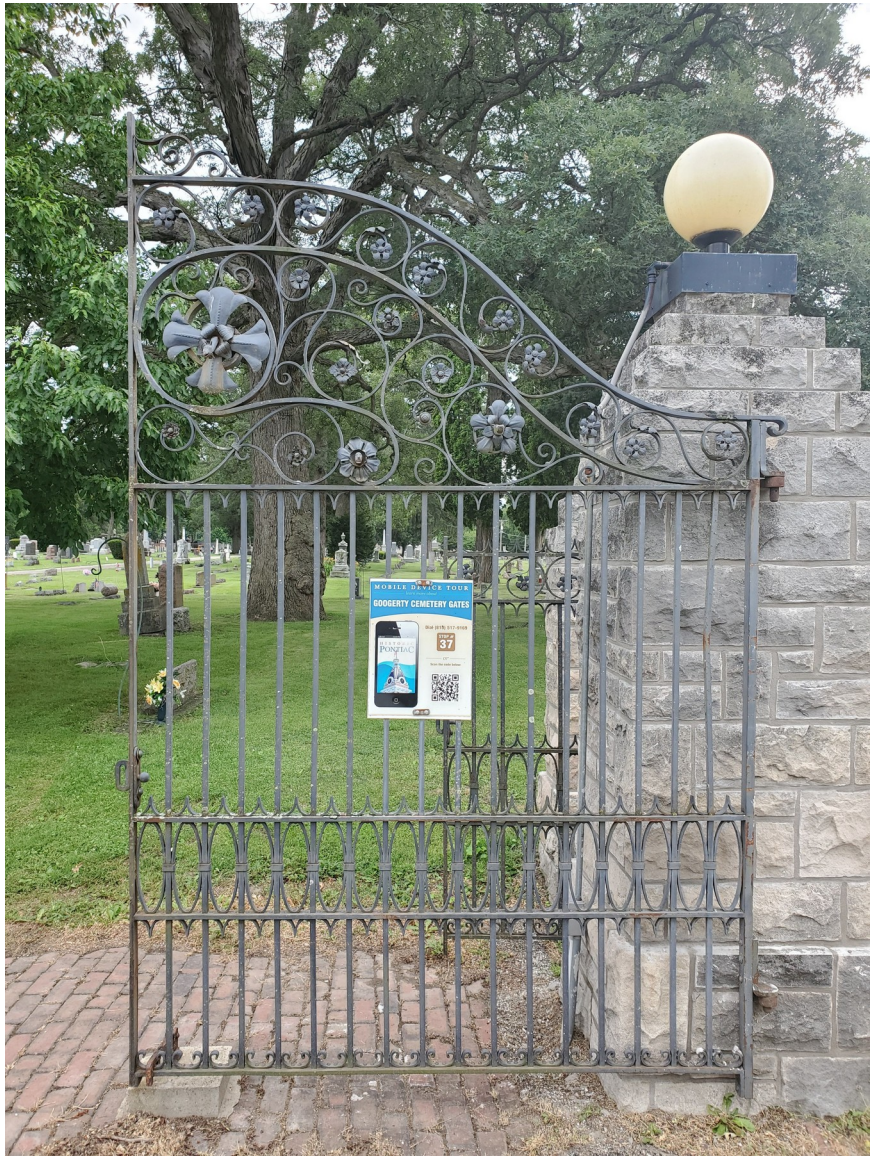
Thomas F. Googerty



Thomas F. Googerty

- Last major iron projects were making entrance gates for Pontiac Southside Cemetery and St. Mary's Catholic Cemetery
- He designed then and directed students at the Reformatory to make them
- Both sets of gates still in use today !!

Thomas F. Googerty



Southside

Thomas F. Googerty

Southside

Thomas F. Googerty

St. Mary’s Catholic Cemetery

Thomas F. Googerty

- Thomas F. Googerty died in 1945
- He was 80 years of age
- He donated his estate of more than $1.7 million (in today's dollars) to the Pontiac St. Mary's Catholic Church !!
- In his will, he stipulated that all the iron artifacts found in his house would be donated to the Chicago Art Institute

Thomas F. Googerty

- Executor found 100+ iron items made by Googerty
- He wrapped them in oily rags, stashed them everywhere in the house !
- Somehow, only 19 of the items were accessioned by the Chicago Art Institute
- It remains a mystery where all the items disappeared to ??
  - -Never married
  - -No children
  - -No family in Pontiac when he died

1999

- Pontiac native History Professor Howard S. Miller met Thomas Googerty when Howard was a child
- Became a long-time Googerty history scholar
- Pushed for a special Googerty exhibit at the National Ornamental Museum in Memphis

1999

- Southside Cemetery gates were trucked to Memphis
- Museum personnel refurbished the Googerty made iron gates
- They were featured in the Googerty exhibition
- Exhibit then went to Lakeside Museum in Peoria
- Exhibit finished at Yost House and at Bank of Pontiac

Closing Thoughts

•The Googerty family were pioneer settlers of Pontiac with William Googerty (1800-1870) arriving in 1850 before the railroad came through in 1854.

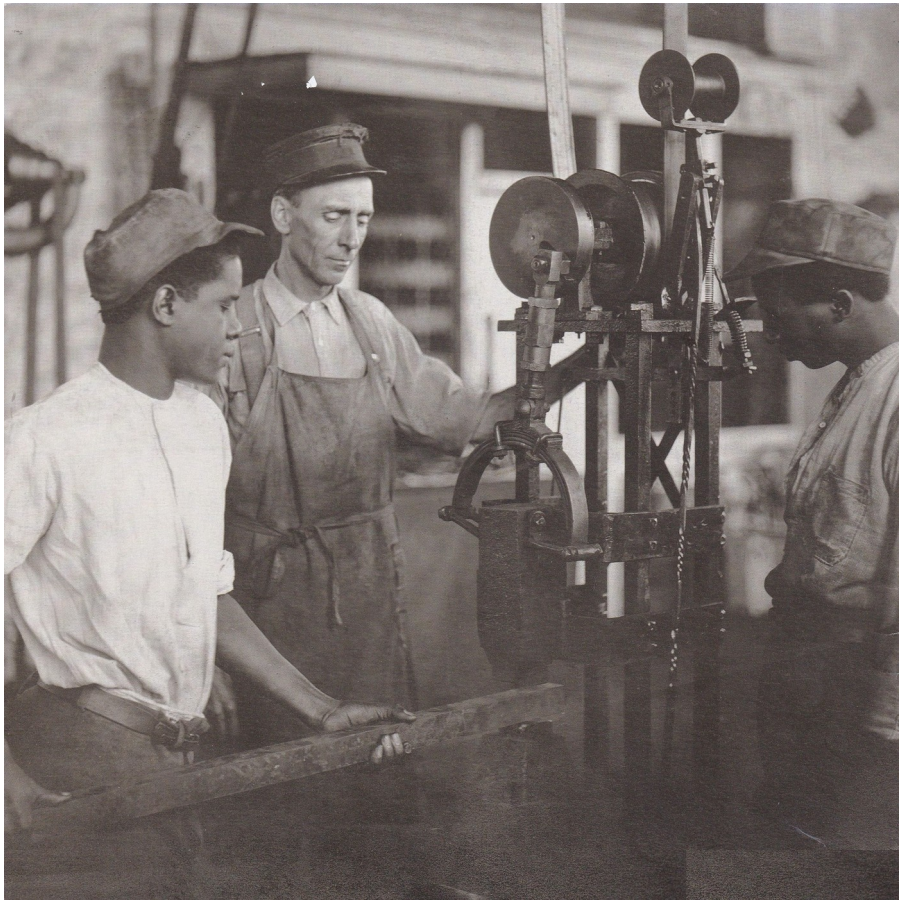
•Thomas F. Googerty was born and raised in Pontiac. He went on to become a nationally known figure in the ornamental iron field. Thomas authored over 50 magazine articles about forging and ornament iron working, as well as three books. His 1911 book is still referred to by modern blacksmiths.

•With his students, Thomas F. Googerty designed and built the iron gates at the Pontiac Southside Cemetery and the St. Mary's Cemetery. These gates are still in use today.

Closing Thoughts

- Thomas F. Googerty was one of the founders of the Amitytown Painters Society.

- Many of his paintings still survive today.

- It is hoped this new book will help to inform future generations about the history of the Googerty family and the national prominence of Thomas F. Googerty.

Questions?